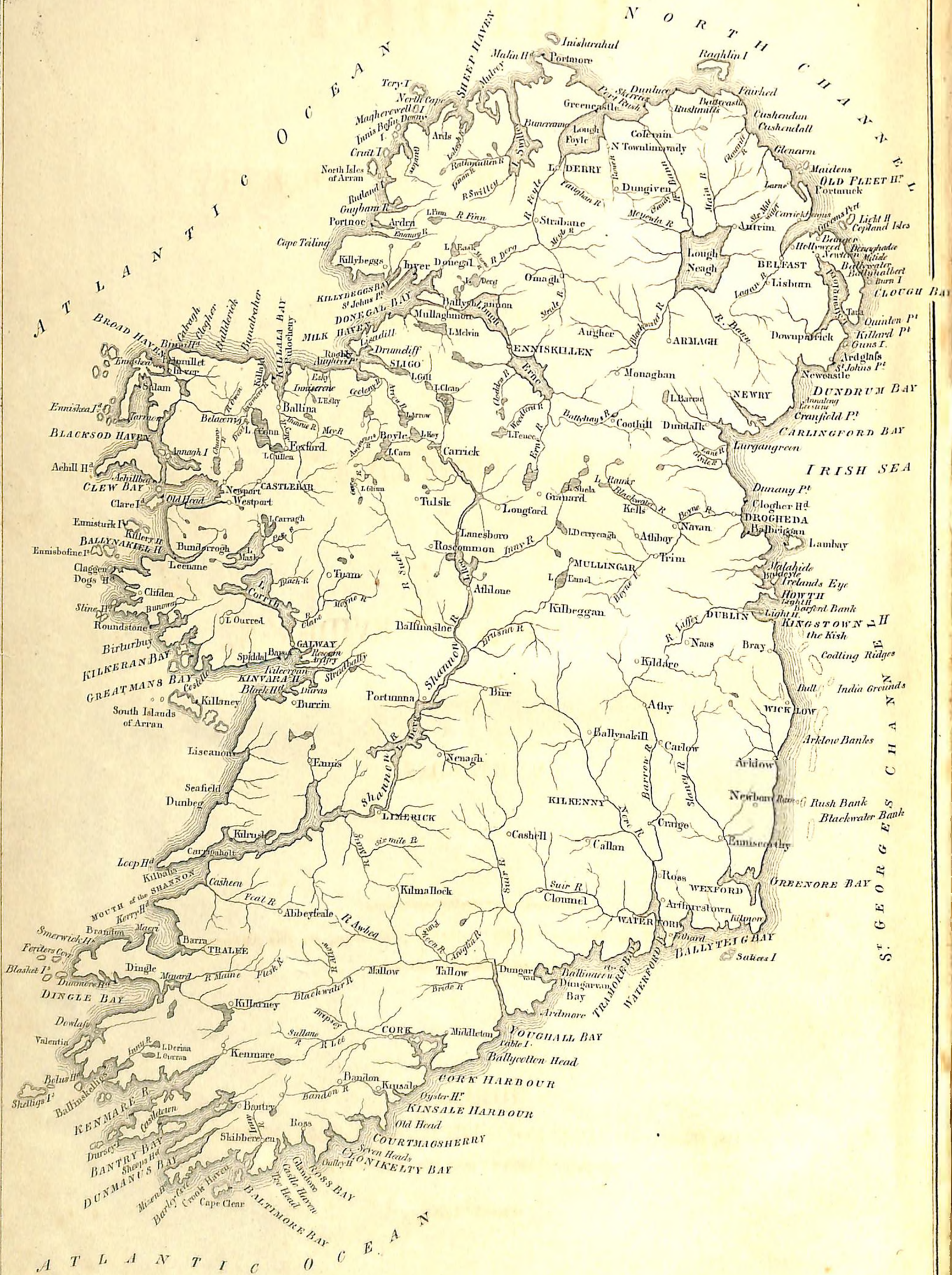


IRELAND

*Descriptive of the Coast the principal
LAKES AND RIVERS*



FIRST
REPORT
OF THE
COMMISSIONERS OF INQUIRY
INTO
THE STATE
OF THE
IRISH FISHERIES;
WITH
THE MINUTES OF EVIDENCE,
AND
APPENDIX.

Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of His Majesty.

DUBLIN:
PRINTED BY ALEXANDER THOM, NORTH EARL-STREET,
FOR HIS MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE.

MDCCCXXXVI.

APPENDIX

FISHERY COMMISSION.

LETTER OF APPOINTMENT AND INSTRUCTION.

Dublin Castle, 2nd November, 1835.

GENTLEMEN,—I am directed by the Lord Lieutenant, to convey his wish that you should, as speedily as possible, institute an inquiry respecting the present State of the Irish Fisheries, the Laws affecting, and the Means and Expediency of extending and improving them. His Excellency approves of the accompanying Suggestions as a guide for the Inquiry, and a basis of the Report which he wishes to be presented to him, with as much speed as is compatible with due attention to the matter concerned.

As the Commissioners of the Board of Works could not be expected to do justice to such an Inquiry, in addition to their other avocations, without assistance, His Excellency authorizes you to associate with yourselves in this undertaking the following persons:—CHARLES A. WALKER, Esq., M.P., Sir CHARLES MORGAN, JAMES REDMOND BARRY, JOHN JAGOE, HENRY TOWNSEND, and WILLIAM STANLEY, Esquires.*

Upon the completion of the Report, the Commissioners are desired to submit to His Excellency, for transmission to His Majesty's Treasury, an account of the sums which may be necessary to defray the expenses incurred in the prosecution of the Inquiry, together with such remuneration as they may, in their judgment, deem fitting for any of the persons associated.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your most obedient humble Servant,

MORPETH.

Commissioners of Public Works,
&c., &c., &c.

SUGGESTIONS ON THE COURSE OF THE PROPOSED INVESTIGATION INTO THE SUBJECT OF THE IRISH FISHERIES.

Consult and make an abstract of the principal provisions of the different Acts of Parliament referring to the Fisheries, distinguishing those which have been repealed, from those still in force.

Consult the Reports of the Irish Fishery Board, presented to Parliament; their Minute Books and Correspondence, with any other papers or publications of the day, tending to give an account of the operations of that period.

Although it will be found that nearly the whole of the proceedings at that

* HENRY R. PAINE, Esq., added subsequently.

time were connected with the system of Bounties, and no idea of a renewal of such a system, in any degree, can be admitted; yet it is necessary to record how the affairs were managed, and many useful points unconnected with it, may incidentally be elicited.

Consult the regulations adopted in other countries, more particularly the various Acts of Parliament affecting the Fisheries of England and Scotland; also the Reports of any Commissions, Boards, or Committees, or of any private Societies or Associations for the Promotion of the Fisheries; to ascertain the measures that may have been, or still are adopted for that purpose.

Much information may probably be obtained from works published on the subject, as also from Pamphlets, Reviews, &c.

Endeavour to ascertain from these sources, as well as from inquiries, as from persons conversant in the various branches of the business, and experienced in the regulations adopted at the different Fishery Stations, what are the measures that have been found beneficial, and those which have proved otherwise. The object being to catch as great a quantity of fish as can be taken, without the risk of producing scarcity in succeeding years; various interesting subjects of inquiry present themselves, as connected with this desideratum. It will be necessary to ascertain how far the restrictions, laid upon different modes of fishing, the limits to the seasons, to the localities of different fisheries, and to the kind of nets employed, are founded on good principles; and whether some of these regulations have not originated in old and erroneous conceptions, or in the false principle of encouraging the more imperfect methods adopted by the poorer class who have not capital or means for the adoption of improved systems.

The poor fishermen on the coast naturally support the latter principle, on the plea of the cruelty of not enforcing restrictions on operations depriving them, as they believe, of their only means of subsistence, and thus reducing themselves and families to a state of beggary; but whatever other expedients may be adopted for their benefit, the principle of individual relief, at the expense of general improvement cannot be admitted.

Visit the different stations on the Irish Coast—inquire minutely into their capabilities—the varieties of fish found there—the seasons for taking them—and the best modes for the purpose—the probable extent to which the business might be carried—the nature of the shores, harbours, and accommodation for the vessels—the interior communications, markets, &c.

Ascertain the means employed, and the extent to which the work is at present carried.

Investigate any peculiarity affecting each station, the dissensions among the boatmen or fishermen, whether arising from subjects connected with the business, or from party feelings; the superstitions or prejudices existing in some parts; the degree of undue influence exercised by associations, or any existing tendency towards injurious combinations, or other acts likely to deter capitalists from embarking in the undertaking.

On many parts of the coast disputes have arisen between the line fishermen and those using trawling, or other nets, which have led to acts of violence complained of. Such proceedings have been reported in Dublin Bay, off the Skerries, at Dingle Bay, and other places. At the Claddagh (Galway town) an association has long existed among the fishermen, who have a self-appointed chief, and are subject to rules and regulations founded on superstitious

and indolent habits, and opposed to many useful and industrious operations. So powerful is this body, that it has been very frequently necessary to check their proceedings by Government armed vessels. These are a few instances; but many others may probably be found in other places.

The result of this examination will tend to prove how far the provisions of the Acts of Parliament, and the existing measures and regulations are efficient or otherwise; whether those founded on general principles are applicable, and should be adopted, or if they may not require modification, or addition for peculiar circumstances, or localities.

Much information may probably be obtained on this head from the officers employed by the old Fishery Board; but the opinions of those in subordinate stations must be received with caution on the subject of the systems it may be advisable to adopt, as in many instances their minds are deeply imbued with ideas of the propriety of the renewal of Bounties—of extensive Government establishments, with other measures not generally approved on the present improved system of true policy; but which will naturally find clamorous advocates on the slightest encouragement.

It would be necessary to take a distinct view of the operations and regulations for the deep sea, the inland, and the shore Fisheries, as also that at the mouths of rivers.

All are of great importance, have been much neglected, and require different treatment.

The propriety of the use of the Scotch stake-net, against which there is a strong prejudice in Ireland, is deserving of consideration. They are undoubtedly most productive, but it is asserted that they exhaust the supply of fish to an extent that may threaten a material diminution in the stock for many years.

In the rivers, the construction of Eel and Salmon weirs will form an interesting subject of inquiry; and whether they also, in their present form, and being practically of unlimited operation in season and situation, may not be found too destructive.

A clear statement of these and other similar researches will be extremely valuable as a guide to future exertions, and on them may be founded the detailed provisions of an entire new Act, of which the regulations should be under the cognizance of the civil Magistrates and authorities of the country, with as little direct interference as possible from the Government, an interference which has hitherto been too much mixed up with every undertaking in Ireland.

FIRST REPORT

ON

THE IRISH FISHERIES.

THE COMMISSIONERS appointed on the 2nd November, 1835, to Inquire into the State of the Irish Fisheries, and the means of improving them, proceeded without delay in the execution of their charge. They commenced the Inquiry by issuing three separate sets of Queries:—

- 1st. To the Officers of the Coast Guard in Ireland, and all other persons supposed to be acquainted with the Irish Sea Fisheries.
- 2nd. To the Officers of the Coast Guard in Great Britain, the British Fishery Officers, and such other persons as were likely to possess information relative to the British Fisheries, which might be available in the Irish Inquiry.
- 3rd. To persons interested in, or acquainted with, the Irish Salmon Fisheries.

Commissioners subsequently proceeded to the principal fishing places on the Irish coast, for the purpose of personally examining into the operations of the Fisheries, and the condition of the fishermen, their boats and gear; into the state of harbours and other accommodations provided for fishermen in their respective localities; and also into the trade of fish-curing, the local markets, and the means of transmitting fish to interior towns.

Two Commissioners visited the Isle of Man, which is much frequented by Irish fishers during the summer Herring season; and Liverpool, which is one of their principal markets.

Meanwhile, application was made through the Irish Chief Secretary's Office, for such information concerning the Fishery Laws of Foreign Nations, as could be obtained by diplomatic agency; in consequence of which, documents have been received from France, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Russia, and Sweden, displaying the extent of legislative interference with the Fisheries exercised in those countries.

From the Scotch Fishery Board, the records of the late Irish Fishery Commissioners, and from those members of their own body who had formerly belonged to the latter Board, they have obtained much valuable information.

They consulted such publications as they could procure, in any way connected with the Fisheries; and they have examined, in Dublin, several Merchants, Fish-curers, Salesmen, and Boat-owners.

The information thus acquired they have separated and arranged for appending to two distinct Reports: the first on the Coast Fisheries; the second on the Salmon or River Fisheries.

THE COAST FISHERIES.

The Fisheries of the Irish coast, with regard both to their productiveness, and to their commercial relations, may be conveniently divided into districts:

1st. From the Shannon to Malin Head, (the most northerly point of Donegal,) the waters abound with fish; but the means of fishing (except at Galway,) are rude and inefficient. The fishermen are for the most part holders of small patches of land; and with them, fishing is only an occasional occupation. Along the line of this extensive coast, regular fishing is confined to a few towns; and the trade is only considerable during the Herring seasons. At those times, however, travelling traders repair in great numbers to the several fishing harbours, to purchase fish, which they carry to the interior to be consumed fresh. Upon these traders the Herring fishers principally depend; for it is only at Galway and at Killybegs on the coast of Donegal, that they derive any aid from fish-curers.

It is in this district that poverty especially prevails, that famines are of ordinary recurrence, and that the means of the fisherman are the most completely inadequate to a profitable pursuit of his avocation. Here it is, that the general condition of the country offers the fewest auxiliaries to the philanthropist in his plans of improvement; and that the Commissioners have found the greatest difficulty in discovering any satisfactory and applicable measure of relief. Along the greater part of this line of coast, the boats, both in size and in construction, are unfitted for encountering the uncertain and turbulent ocean; while the remoteness of the great towns, leaves the fisherman (excepting those near Galway and Sligo,) without a sufficient accessible supply of salt and of other means for curing the fish, should they arrive in great abundance on the shore.

So destitute of resources are the inhabitants upon part of the Donegal coast, that it is stated by Lieutenant M'Gladdery, of the Coast Guard, that it is usual for the peasantry to club their bed clothes in considerable numbers, in order to take Herrings with them in the inlets of the sea; their families meantime dispensing altogether with those necessities.—(*Evidence*, p. 55.)

2dly, From Malin Head to Belfast Loch, the demand on the industry of the fisherman is more steady; fishing is more continuously pursued (excepting on a part of the Antrim coast, where the fishermen are landholders,) and the supplies thus obtained find a ready sale either at home, or in the markets of Glasgow and Liverpool. To the latter places the fish are conveyed by steamers, which ply between these towns and Londonderry or Belfast.

In this district, also, the means of fishing are very defective. Along the coasts of both districts, shoals of Mackerel appear during the autumn; but in neither of them is any preparation made for taking that valuable fish.

3dly, From the Loch of Belfast, proceeding southward, the waters continue productive; but agricultural employment being more remunerative, the trade of fishing (except for Herrings) is constantly followed at two or three places only. On this line of coast, the population are generally indifferent to the pursuit.

4thly, From Carlingford, through the Bay of Dublin, as far as Wexford, complaints are heard of the scarcity of fish; and in point of fact, from Dublin to Wexford, little fishing is carried on for the supply of the Dublin market. It is confidently asserted that this diminution amounts to three-fourths of the quantity taken at a period not many years distant.—(*Evidence of Dublin Fishermen and Salesmen*.) This failure in productiveness is attributed to an over-fishing, and to a destruction of spawn,—both imputed to the trawlers. The supply of large fish, also, it is said has decreased; and the Dublin Haddock of other days, more especially, has become a rare prize; but large Haddock is now abundant on the southern coast, where it did not exist at the time when it was most plentiful in Dublin Bay. In seeming contradiction to this evidence, it must be stated, that the number of productive banks to the north of Howth, reported by the Coast Guard Officers, is considerable. It is therefore probable, that the asserted scarcity of fish, if not altogether an error, applies chiefly to the in-shore fisheries. The English trawlers, who are well appointed, and fish the deep waters, make no complaints; Mr. Bartlett, on the contrary, acknowledges a steady profit of £30 per cent. on his outlay, with which he seems perfectly satisfied. With respect more particularly to the Wicklow and Wexford coast, the most urgent complaint is less of the want of fish, than of shelter: as on this part of the coast the quantity of moving sand and the power of the waves, render the construction of permanent harbours extremely difficult.

5thly, At Waterford, again, the fishing resources were long believed to be abundant. The famous Nymph Bank off that county, was asserted to yield White Fish in an inexhaustible quantity; and evidence has been offered, that persons on the Light-ship moored near this bank, have recently fished with wonderful success.—(*See Mr. Halpin's Letter*, p. 180.) However, the local replies to queries state, that a scarcity of fish is very generally felt on this coast.

From Waterford, round the entire south coast, a recent decline in the productiveness of the water, and a scarcity of fish are matters of continued local complaint. But this scarcity seems to be confined only to the bays and in-shore fisheries, to which the operations of the fishermen, owing to their poverty, and insufficient gear, are chiefly confined. On many points along this line, round to the mouth of the Shannon (which completes the circuit of Ireland,) the markets cannot be considered as altogether deficient. There are several great towns,

Cork included, which derive their chief supplies from this coast, and the number of secondary towns in the interior is considerable. In these markets, however, the coast of Kerry, from its position, has little participation; and generally, the communication between the inland towns and the fishing harbours is less active, than, with a little attention to means and appliances, it might be; in so much, that the fisheries on the southern coast are by no means what a glance at the geography of the country might lead the inquirer to expect.

In the Evidence will be found a description of the most remarkable fishing grounds around the entire coast of Ireland, as supplied by the Coast Guard replies to the Commissioners' queries. These are founded on information communicated by the fishermen; and though, in all probability not sufficiently accurate, they are still enough to satisfy the inquirer that the miserable and depressed condition of the Fisheries is not a consequence of defective natural resources; and that, on the contrary, Ireland is a decidedly favoured country as to the riches of its waters. With this fact foreign nations were early acquainted, and their fishermen were long accustomed to approach the Irish coasts, for the purpose of fishing on ground superior to any near their own country.

Exclusively of the edible fish, properly so called, Ireland possesses Oyster banks which yield valuable returns, where properly fished; and the Lobster Fishery would form a most lucrative branch of industry—but it is not efficiently worked. Lobsters exist in great plenty on various points of the coast; yet, the English markets derive their principal supplies from Norway; while in the Irish markets, Lobsters are scarce, dear, and often not to be had.

The Sunfish and Whale are met with in the Irish Seas; the former, only a few years since, visited the north-west coast annually, in considerable numbers; but it is stated that they are now rarely seen there; resorting, according to the opinion of those best acquainted with the subject, to banks more distant from the coast. From this cause, and also perhaps from the inexpertness of the fishermen, and the want of proper boats to follow the business, the taking of Sunfish may be said to have ceased;—(*See Galway Evidence*;) and the oil formerly in high repute in the Dublin market, is, at present, scarcely to be found in the trade. To pursue the Sunfish with effect, the vessels employed should, according to Dutton, be of from 80 to 100 tons burthen, with three attendant boats, manned with eight men each; but in the evidence taken at Galway, vessels of 40 tons are stated to be sufficient. The Galway fishermen, however, search for these animals in their ordinary fishing boats; and boats of a still smaller size have been used for the same purpose, on the coast of Mayo. It is also stated that when the Mayo fishermen took a fish or two, a large portion of the oil was lost by conveying the liver to land in a small open boat, as well as by the want of fit means on shore for extracting and saving the oil. It is, then, not unlikely that the prevailing opinion is correct; and that the fish are still to be found further from the shore, if due pains were taken to seek them. If this be so, (and it deserves the inquiry of interested persons,) a valuable enterprise is open to such fishermen as could proceed on an adequate scale of operations. The high price of Spermaceti oil in Dublin, and the excellent quality of the Sunfish oil, (especially if due care were taken to boil it while the liver is fresh and sweet,) would ensure a brisk and steady sale for the article.—(*See Mr. Morris's Statement, Clifden Evidence, p. 92.*)

A similar complaint of this disappearance of fish from their accustomed haunts, is made with respect to the Herring; the shoals being said to have left, wholly or partially, several places where heretofore they were abundant.

The Herring is a fish of rather uncertain movements. It is known to have deserted, for a time, bays where it has for seasons abounded; and then, again to re-appear in large quantities.—(*See Mr. Loch's Evidence, also the Swedish Papers, in Appendix.*)—No cause worthy of confidence has been assigned for the fact; the whole history, indeed, of the migrations of the Herring having hitherto been involved in obscurity.

It is an opinion daily gaining ground among naturalists, and may nearly be taken as established, that the imputed annual movement of the shoals from north to south, is an error; and that the Herrings, and all (so called) migratory fish, merely leave the deep waters, and approach the shores for the purpose of spawning.—(*See Mr. Mitchell's Letter, in Appendix.*) This latter opinion rests on a strong analogy with the known habits of Salmon in that particular; also on the certainty that Herrings are taken on some or other parts of our coasts, at all times of the year; and it is strengthened by the remarkable fact, that the remains of the

Herring are not found in the stomach of those whales which are killed in high latitudes; though they are, in that of the species which are found on our own coast.

While the grand facts are thus in dispute, it seems vain to attempt an explanation of the more partial and irregular phenomena. Fishermen, however, are apt to complain of the shoals being less abundant on their stations than formerly. But though certain bays may be thus partially affected, the Herring is always to be found in the open sea during its season; (*see evidence taken in Donegal, Mayo, and Galway*;) and boats which have stood out into the deep water, have returned laden, when the bay fishery utterly failed.

CONDITION OF THE FISHERMEN.

In 1830, when the establishment was dissolved which had been formed by Government in 1819, for promoting the Irish Fisheries, similar to that created for the Scotch Fisheries in 1808, and still maintained, there were around the coast of Ireland, 64,771 fishermen, and 13,119 fishing boats. In 1836, there are, according to a carefully revised enumeration, made by the Officers of the Coast Guard, only 54,119 fishermen, and 10,761 boats.

This decrease of 10,652 in the number of persons occupied in supplying fish for the markets of an increasing population, occurring so suddenly, while the consumption of all other domestic supplies has been considerably augmented, and in a period during which the markets of Liverpool and Manchester have largely increased the demand on the industry of Irish fishers, is a lamentable fact, too plainly indicative of much local suffering. It appears, however, that at the appointment of the late Fishery Board, the total fishing population of Ireland amounted to but 36,000, and that during the short course of its activity, the numbers increased to nearly the double. Hence it may be inferred that the subsequent falling off, must, in part at least, be a result of some previous excess of stimulation; and that the bounties had indeed drawn more persons to this branch of industry, than in the then condition of the country were really enabled to support themselves by its exercise, without Government aid.

In estimating the condition of the fishermen, they may be properly divided into four classes:

1. Those constantly engaged in fishing; who belong to Dublin Bay, Galway, Kinsale, Carrickfergus, Arklow, Dungarvan, and a few other stations.
2. Those partly engaged in fishing, and occasionally in the coast trade, (as the boat-owners, and part of their crews, in Skerries or Balbriggan); or partly in fishing, and partly in collecting sea-weed for manure, (as the boat-owners, with a portion of their crews, in Galway.)
3. Those who, while not employed in fishing, are occupied in agriculture, either as landholders or labourers.
4. Those who have not any employment on sea or land, when the boats to which they belong are engaged in carrying general freights or sea-weed.

The last class of fishermen occasionally suffer great distress; as their earnings, when employed, are either insufficient for their maintenance through the year, or are not providently used.

The fishermen within the third classification, who occupy land, are affected, like all other agriculturists, by the competition price of land, and by the uncertainty of their tenures.

Upon the influence of such a combination of employments on the condition and comforts of the fishermen, the evidence by no means agrees; the discrepancy arising probably from the circumstance that some witnesses compare the fisherman who has a farm, with the exclusive fisherman, at a place where his trade is active; while others, looking only at communities where the Fisheries languish, compare the fisherman who has a potato garden with him who has not this resource. The holding at a reasonable rent as much land as will feed a cow, and supply potatoes, cannot but improve the condition of the fisherman, as it does that of the agricultural labourer; and the person so circumstanced should be distinguished from him who is part fisherman and part farmer, and who, professing both trades, is probably without the enterprize and intrepidity necessary to success in fishing: in the former case, the sense of property, from the possession of a comfortable home, and the social attachments and order thereby produced, must greatly increase the enjoyments of the fisherman, and in every way render him a better member of society.

In the poorer agricultural districts, the occasional employment of the working farmer in the Herring Fishery, may place him above his neighbour who neglects to avail himself of that resource. But on the other hand, the habit of combining the practice of fishing with that of farming, in as much as it takes away from efficiency in both avocations, must be less profitable, than if but one of the avocations were pursued, strenuously and exclusively, under happier circumstances.

On a careful review of the whole subject, it may be presumed that wherever agriculture is pursued with ordinary industry and success, it is a more profitable occupation than fishing, excepting only a few stations, where the demand is constantly and continuously large. In point of fact, the fishermen of Ireland, usually depend more on the land than on the sea; and their condition is mainly determined by the local circumstances of agriculture. Where these are good, the fisherman will generally be found comparatively at his ease, on the combined earnings of farming and fishing; while, in poor and remote districts, the occupation at sea rarely proves a sufficient substitute for agricultural employment.

Those who follow fishing more constantly, but yet cultivate a small portion of land, partake probably of the general condition of the neighbouring peasantry, or are in some places perhaps a little above it: and lastly, those who have not this resource, either want capital altogether, (whether for agriculture or for fishing,) or they inhabit the most barren districts, or are deficient in that industry and enterprize, which are universally necessary to worldly success. With very few exceptions, this class are represented as struggling for the lowest rate of remuneration, badly clothed, and living in miserable cabins; while numbers of disabled and sick, with widows and orphans, are stated to be completely destitute, without charitable institutions, and dependent upon casual relief, or the generosity of those of their own class, who are in active employment. Opinions, of course, differ as to the immediate causes of this distress. Some refer it to the suppression of bounties, and the consequent laying up of boats; others to the want of local encouragement; but the far greater number ascribe it to the want of proper boats and gear, and to an ignorance of the best modes of fishing.

In some places, however, the well equipped, skilful, and prudent fisherman, is represented as able to support a family, without land, on a scale of comfort superior to that of other labourers.—(*See Dublin, Carrickfergus, Galway, and Kinsale Evidence.*)

On the social habits of fishermen, the Commissioners are unwilling to hazard much remark. Like the Irish peasant, the fisherman, is enterprising and industrious whenever a prospect of reward is held out; and the man who voluntarily seeks his living on the sea, cannot be wanting in aptitude for labour, courage, or perseverance against adverse circumstances. The emigrants from the Island of Arran are reported to earn a comfortable livelihood by fishing at New-York and Boston; thereby proving their general qualification for the business, when duly encouraged.—(*See Mr. Morris's Evidence, p. 97.*)

As to honesty, the Irish fisherman is considered to be habitually punctual in his money dealings. But, with respect to sobriety, directly hostile testimony has been offered, even from the same districts.

It appears undeniable that an abuse of ardent spirits prevails among the fishermen in towns, but exists to a less extent in the smaller fishing villages. As this vice exhausts too large a portion of the earnings of the poorer classes generally, the Commissioners must include it among the causes which operate injuriously on the Fisheries. It is an evil which can only be abated by raising the condition and multiplying the comforts of the fishermen,—by the influence of a practical education,—and by a change in those fiscal laws which are found to promote a pernicious consumption of the article.

In the exercise of their calling, the fishermen are accused of evincing strong prejudices; and a very common disposition to combine for the purposes of intimidation, and to make their own will the law against all rivals and competitors. Such practices are not unknown in different kind and degree among other tradesmen; and though they may disappear, as civilization advances, they still constitute an evil that excites a frequent cry for redress.

In equipment and skill, the Irish fishermen do not successfully compete with those from England.

During the summer, when the boats from St. Ives are engaged in the Irish Channel Herring Fishery, even the Skerries men find it more advantageous to buy their fish from the

Englishmen, and carry it to Liverpool, than to engage with inferior boats and nets, in a rivalry of fishing on their own account.

This inferiority is at once a cause and effect of the low condition of the Irish Fisheries; and it must exist, until the Irish fisherman shall possess better equipments, and also the requisite skill for using them.

The proposition of adding to the existing plan of national education, schools of special instruction in useful employments, is daily gaining ground in public opinion. Such instruction is recommended for agriculturists, by the Poor Inquiry Commissioners; and its importance for this object was pointed to in 1803, by Mr. Jefferson, late President of the United States. "The charitable schools," he observes, "instead of storing their pupils with a lore which the present state of society does not call for, being converted into schools of agriculture, might restore them (the pupils) to that branch, qualified to enrich and honour themselves, and to increase the productions of the nation." Its importance in maritime pursuits has also been acknowledged. Lord Cloncurry, in his "Design of a Law for Promoting the Pacification of Ireland," published in 1834, proposes that "where asylums (for the poor) shall be on the sea coast, the male children disposed and fit, shall be trained to fishing, and instructed in boat-building, net-making, and navigation, so that they shall become expert fishermen and skilful pilots." Sir John Franklin, in his evidence before the Commissioners also proposes practical instruction, as the best mode of improving the Irish Fisheries; and suggestions for increasing the skill, and altering the habits of the present fishermen, by the distribution of pecuniary rewards, are given under the head of Premiums, in another part of this Report. As an efficient pilot, mariner, or fisherman, the coast inhabitant of the poorer classes would be a most useful member of the community.

MARKETS.

In the Minutes of Evidence there is given a condensation of Returns received from public officers and other residents in the principal towns of Ireland, expressing their opinions as to the extent of the supplies of fish, compared with the demand; and the evidence of Mr. Hoare, a Dublin salesman, and of Mr. Locke, a fish dealer, as to the supply of the Dublin market, is also given. All these go to shew, that the quantities of fish, both fresh and cured, obtained from Irish fishermen, are insufficient to meet the demand in the markets; which is fully demonstrated, as to cured Herrings, by the great importation of them from Scotland, exhibited in the accounts published annually by the Scotch Fishery Board: it is also corroborated as to dried fish, which is nearly all imported.

In reference to this general assertion of the excess of demand over supply, it is necessary to distinguish between the fresh and the cured article.

With respect to the former, the prices certainly do not indicate any great pressure of demand on supply. In places, however, where population is widely spread, and the roads are few and bad, the supply of the inland towns is in all likelihood both deficient and precarious,—depending on the movements of carriers, who do not confine themselves to this mode of employment. Hence, on the sea-shore occasional gluts and scarcities, which prevent the successful pursuit of fishing; while in the markets of the interior, there is a cry for larger supplies, which are not to be obtained. Mr. Rothwell's evidence, (*Kerry*, p. 136,) states, that in his neighbourhood, fishing, independently of the curer, would be attended with no profit, as (in the present state of the trade) flat fish, or that which is suited only to the fresh market, is hardly worth taking; "and the consequence is, that it is as often scarce as abundant." Mr. Grey also says, (*Kerry*, p. 129,) that the price of fresh fish is miserably low, yet the supply is not equal to one half the demand.—(*See also Evidence of Mr. Cadogan, County Cork, page 156, and more especially of Mr. Gowan, taken in Dublin.*)

That in a potatoe fed population, there should be a steady demand for fresh fish, is indeed all but inconceivable; especially as regards the finer species, everywhere reserved for the tables of the easy classes.

These local statements, it is probable, express a general truth. Where a constant excess of really effective demand exists, it should manifest itself in high prices; and if these generally prevailed in Ireland, without producing a correspondent industry, the claim of the fisherman upon the public for support and encouragement, would be slender indeed.

If these views be correct, it will follow that as the improvement, now taking place in the general condition of the country, must lead to an increased demand, and to increased communication between the coast and the interior, that circumstance will give an additional stimulus to the fishermen; which, if assisted by improved harbours, and such other necessary means as a wise economy may supply, will, after no great lapse of time, place this department of industry in a more healthy condition, and be met by increased exertions on the part of those engaged in the trade.

The facts as to the demand for salted fish are too decided to admit of doubt. Scotch Herrings are on sale in the greater number of Irish towns, and even at places near the sea-coast, almost beside the living shoals.

With respect to the other species of salted fish; the Continental demand for dried fish is at present extensive, and new markets might possibly be found capable of taking off increased quantities. Considering the progress of the Colonies, and the growing prosperity of civilized Europe, the prospect of remunerative returns for this article must be regarded as promising. The taking of white fish has hitherto been comparatively neglected, probably on account of the Newfoundland Fisheries, or because they abound only in the deep sea, where the boats are not sufficiently commodious to follow them: but if the resources of the Irish seas be not greatly exaggerated, the people of this country could easily bring their fish to market at a cost below that attendant on a long voyage to a distant fishery.

On the causes which occasion the prevalent importation of salted fish, the Commissioners regret that the information they have received is incomplete and contradictory. It is frequently stated, that Irish fish has a preference in the market, and fetches better prices than Scotch. But the Galway evidence shews that the bulk-cured Irish fish is saved in a coarse and inferior way.—(*See also the evidence of S. Mitchell, p. 68; and of Mr. Morris, p. 96.*) How then can it bear a higher price? And again, if it does so, why does it not drive the Scotch fish out of the market? Irish capital, it appears, (*see Dublin Evidence*) is sent to Wick, to be there employed in curing Herrings; which could not be, if the article could be procured better and cheaper at the domestic fishing stations. But, however, this may be, the Commissioners are safe in pointing to an increase of care and of economy, as the surest means of extending the home market.

MEANS FOR IMPROVEMENT.

Turning from the actual condition of the Irish Fisheries, to the means for their amelioration, the Commissioners have cast a retrospective glance at the course of legislation hitherto pursued both at home and abroad. At the outset of the attempt of the British Government to obtain a national fishery, the most direct means of encouragement were considered the best; but in later times, the effort has been restricted principally to bounties, small grants, loans, the construction of piers and harbours, and (in Scotland) the establishment of fishing stations; each of these deserves a short separate consideration.

No considerable and general effort was made for aiding the industry of the Irish fishermen, till 1819, when Commissioners were appointed for applying, in Ireland, the system adopted for the Scotch Fisheries in 1808. These Commissioners were empowered to distribute public money in bounties, to persons fitting out fishing boats of a specified tonnage, and curing Herrings, Cod, Ling, and some other fish; also, to make regulations suited to particular localities, and inflict penalties for practices then made illegal. A sum of £5000 Irish, was annually placed at their disposal for the further encouragement of the Fisheries, but its application was subsequently limited by law, to the building of piers and repair of fishing boats; and a large portion of the sums accruing from these annual grants, was used as a loan fund, for enabling fishermen to provide equipments on advantageous terms. This system was continued until 1830, when the Irish establishment was abolished.

BOUNTIES.

It will not be expected in the present day, that the Commissioners should enter upon the general question of bounties. The history of their application to the encouragement of Fisheries in Ireland, since the year 1819, the epoch of the Irish fishing establishment is briefly as follows.

The Act of 1819 granted in Ireland, to the owner or person chartering or hiring any vessel of fifteen tons or upwards, for fishing and curing fish, a bounty of £2. 10s. per ton; but not to be paid for any greater number of tons than sixty. This bounty was directed to be distributed in the following manner:—£1 per ton to be paid on the return of each vessel: and out of the remaining £1 10s. a bounty of 6s. per barrel to be paid for Herrings gutted with knives; another of 4s. per barrel for Herrings, Pilchards, and Mackerel, not so gutted; and another of 4s. per cwt. for dried Cod, Ling, Hake, Haddock, Glassen, and Conger.

The following Bounties were also directed to be paid:—

£3 per tun, for every tun of oil from Whales and other fish.

£4 per cwt. on Whalebone.

Three Shillings per barrel, for Herrings, Pilchards, and Mackerel, cured by persons residing in Ireland, conformably to the regulations of the Irish Fishery Board.

This Bounty not payable with the Tonnage Bounty.

Four Shillings per cwt. also to persons residing in Ireland, for dried Cod, Ling, Hake, Haddock, Glassen, and Conger.

By an Act of 1820, chapter 82, the Tonnage Bounty was increased to £3 per ton, for vessels in the Herring Fishery. The bounty of *three shillings* per barrel for Herrings, Pilchards, and Mackerel was abolished, and one of *four shillings* per barrel appointed to be paid for Herrings only; and a bounty of *two shillings and sixpence* per barrel was established for Cod, Ling, Hake, Haddock, Glassen, and Conger, taken on the coasts of Ireland, and cured in pickle.

In 1824, by the Act 5 Geo. IV., cap. 64, the bounty of 4s. per barrel, paid for Herrings in Great Britain or Ireland, was directed to be reduced 1s. a barrel annually, from the 5th of July, 1825, and to cease in 1829. The Bounties of 4s. per cwt. and of 2s. 6d. per barrel, paid in each country, for dried and pickled Cod, Ling, &c. were also appointed to cease in 1829; and the Tonnage Bounties, created by the Acts of 1819 and 1820, were reduced to £1 per ton, from the 5th July, 1825, which was directed to be abated 5s. annually, to 1829, and then to cease.

In 1826, by the Act of 7th Geo. IV., cap. 34, all the Bounties appointed to be paid in 1829, were continued to the 5th of April, 1830.

Under the operation of the system, a great increase in the activity of the trade was experienced, much capital was drawn to it, and large sums were circulated among fishermen, curers, &c.:—what proportion these benefits bore to the sums expended, may be collected from the returns quoted in the Appendix. At the end of ten years, when the bounties were discontinued, the trade began to fall back into languor and exhaustion; little or no new capital had been created by their assistance, and vested in the Fisheries; accordingly, many of the boats which had been employed under their stimulation, were immediately withdrawn from the trade, and suffered to rot on the beach, while the men sought other employment, or sunk into mendicancy, &c. The fishing boats of Rush and Skerries are even now over-manned, to provide subsistence for fishermen thus thrown out of employment. (*See Balbriggan Evidence.*) Some portion of this failure may indeed be assigned to causes not necessarily inherent in the system; such as the shortness of its duration,—the abrupt manner in which the bounties were withdrawn,—the cost of outfit incurred by boat-owners to obtain them,—and to evasions and frauds which were largely practised to the injury of the fair dealer.

Bounties on tonnage were within the reach only of the owners of large decked boats. This scale of bounty was adopted from the Dutch, who fish in remote stations, and have long voyages to make. The contrary being the case in Ireland, the vessels so drawn into the Irish trade proved not to be generally available; and when the bounties were withdrawn, the decks were removed from many of them, to adapt them better to the service. (*See Evidence of Mr. A. Carberry, Dungarvan, p. 170.*) To obtain the tonnage bounties, vessels were chartered, which were never before used in the Fisheries, and only hired for an occasional adventure. The Irish Bounties on cured fish, on the other hand, did not always insure the employment of Irish fishermen. Adventurers, who chartered vessels from Ireland, proceeded, without one fisherman on board, to the coast of Scotland, cast their nets, to evade the law, then purchased from Scotch fishers enough to fill the barrels, and returned home to get the Bounties.—(*See Evidence of Mr. Thompson, Carrickfergus.*)

Many persons, who had never been concerned in the Fisheries before, also became competitors with the established fishermen, when these Bounties were given; and none but the crews of large boats were served by the tonnage Bounties,—though all partook of the production Bounties.

It is further to be observed, that the Bounties did not augment local employment to any considerable extent among the fishers on the western coast of Ireland; as the boats of Skerries, Balbriggan, and other places, which were employed on that coast in taking fish to cure for the Bounties, brought with them fishermen, who, for the most part, took and cured whatever quantity was required,—and as Bounties were not obtained on the great bulk of the fish caught by the local fishermen.

No permanent establishments or stations for curing fish, were formed on that coast through the stimulus of Bounties. There is not, on the whole line from Malin Head to Galway, one establishment for the drying of Cod and Ling; and the curing of Herrings is at present as defective, even in Galway, as if a bounty for curing in barrels, to preserve the pickle, had never been given.

Only two reasons in support of Bounties have been urged by the boat-owners interested in them: they supplied capital to the adventurers, and enabled their crews to get credit for gear, which was provided in shares. It does not however appear in evidence, that these benefits were of much permanent advantage; and even if notwithstanding such drawbacks, they were still thought of permanent utility, similar advantages might be obtained, by a better and cheaper machinery.

It is true that Bounties for promoting the Fisheries are still given in France, Belgium, and Holland. But the example of other countries, far from affording encouragement to their revival, furnishes a conclusive argument against it; for, if Bounties were capable of accomplishing any permanent good, the necessity for their continuance ought to have ceased in those countries long since.

The whole sum distributed in Bounties by the Irish Fishery Commissioners, from 1819 to 1830, inclusive, is £163,376. 7s. 10d.

GRANTS FOR FISHERMEN'S HARBOURS.

In Scotland, under an Act of 1808, a sum was placed at the disposal of the Commissioners for the Fisheries, not exceeding £3000 a-year, to be distributed for encouraging the Herring Fisheries.

In 1819, a sum of £5000 a-year, Irish currency, was placed by the Act 59, Geo. III. cap. 109, at the disposal of the Irish Fishery Commissioners then appointed, to be applied in encouraging the Coast Fisheries of Ireland.

In 1824, by the Act 5, Geo. IV., cap. 64, both grants were directed to be applied in the following manner:—£500 a-year in each country, to poor fishermen, (where Piers should be built,) for materials to repair their boats; the residue to the building or repairing of Piers and Quays, where one-fourth of the expense should be defrayed by the persons obtaining the grants.

The unapplied balance of the Irish grants was transferred, by an Act of 1830, from the Irish Fishery Board, then abolished, to the Board of Irish Inland Navigation; and in lieu of the grants for Irish Fishermen and Piers, this Act directed a sum of £4500 in the first year, from April, 1830, £3500 in the second year, £2500 in the third, £1500 in the fourth, and £1000 in the fifth year, to be applied in completing Piers commenced before the 5th of April 1830, and in paying persons employed for enforcing the repayment of loans made by the Irish Fishery Board.

These were the last grants given for the Irish Fisheries; and in directing them to be made, the Act did not provide either for maintaining the works on which they were to have been expended, or for preserving the undisputed use of them to the Public; and several of the works are now in a very dilapidated state.

In 1831, by the Act 1 and 2, William IV., cap. 33, the administration of the fund was transferred, with the other duties of the Board of Inland Navigation, to the Commissioners of Irish Public Works, then charged with the superintendence of the Irish Fisheries; and in their hands an unappropriated balance still remains. This residue, it now appears most expedient to apply in repairing such Fishery Piers as may be found useful for the Fisher-

men; and also in improving and adding facilities to them, for fishery purposes; and in promoting improvements generally in the Fisheries.

The policy of applying public money in aid of any branch of industry, however unsound and pernicious on general principles, has nevertheless been deemed wise and beneficial, when adopted for the promotion of objects in which the interests of the community, and of the poorer classes, are more concerned than those of individual capitalists—such as the improvement of harbours and rivers, to facilitate general commerce, and also (the Commissioners submit) the providing of harbour accommodations for fishermen.

There are various accommodations required by fishermen, which are peculiar to their trade, which their own means are insufficient to provide, and in which landlords or other capitalists have not a sole pecuniary interest sufficient to induce an outlay for providing them: such are piers, boat-slips with capstans, moorings, harbour-lanterns, with sheds or stores for sails and other uses connected with the fisheries. Heretofore a portion of such accommodations has been provided by grants of public money, in aid of local contributions; but the Commissioners are of opinion, that all should be provided on the same principle, wherever they may be requisite; whether the local contributions shall be made in money, subscribed by individuals, or assessed on the localities, or made in materials supplied by the fishermen.

In order also to give complete utility to some works of this description, it is necessary to form roads between them and the leading lines of public communication; these, the Commissioners conceive, should be provided for on the same principle as the harbour expenditure.

Although much has been already done, much still remains to be effected; and a provision is also required for maintaining such works as have been already constructed. The present obligation to repair, when thrown on the applicants for Government assistance, becomes a serious impediment to the voluntary co-operation of individuals in erecting public works. The Commissioners therefore beg to suggest that power be given to levy local tolls for keeping fishery works in repair. The means by which, in the opinion of the Commissioners, this would be best attained, will be found at the conclusion of the Report.

Another inconvenience should also be removed, which has hitherto impeded and circumscribed the utility of such constructions. Where the voluntary principle has prevailed, piers have been erected on those sites only for which local proprietors were found to contribute, which were not always the sites calculated the most perfectly to answer the purpose.—(*See Mr. Donnell's Observations in Appendix.*)

GRANTS TO FISHERMEN.

From 1824 to 1830, grants, amounting in all to £500 a year, were, by the Act 5th Geo. IV., cap. 64, directed to be distributed, as already stated, for repairing the boats of poor fishermen, at places where piers had been erected. Grants to the same amount, and for a similar purpose, are still distributed, under the same law, among poor fishermen in Scotland. There, it appears, they are given in very small amounts, and only once in three years to the same person; yet they are said, though subject to occasional abuse, to have a very beneficial operation. However, it must be observed that in Scotland there are the public officers of the Fishery Commissioners stationed around the coast, through whom the distribution is made; but in Ireland there is now no such machinery, and without its aid, the administration of the fund would not be easy.—(*See Scotch Accounts and Extracts.*)

The policy, moreover, of these grants is very questionable. If given for repairing fishing boats, they may be as justly sought for all other implements of industry; and fishermen requiring materials for nets or lines, have stronger claims to aid, than those with damaged boats, who are not so poor.

This mode of relieving the Irish fishermen is not only objectionable, but so inadequate to their wants, that the Commissioners will not avail themselves of the example set in Scotland, to support a recommendation for its revival in Ireland. They consider the operation of Loan Funds as a better means of assisting the fisherman's individual necessities; and they look forward to their establishment for the purpose.

GRANTS FOR LOCAL INSTRUCTION, AND PREMIUMS TO FISHERMEN.

Among the means suggested for extending the Fisheries, are premiums for good boats, and nets, and for the most scientific and successful modes of fishing. If such aids be calculated merely to stimulate the fisherman in the improvement of his art, and not made to draw supernumeraries into the business, they may be safe. The danger lies in the possibility of over-doing the proposed end; and to avoid that, if the attempt be made, it should rigidly be confined to local agents voluntarily interesting themselves in the undertaking. It cannot, however, be concealed that in Ireland such a voluntary effort, unassisted by the public purse, is not always to be expected; and it is a question worthy of consideration, whether any, or what encouragement should be held out to associators for fishery improvement, who may be inclined to watch particular localities, and apply such stimuli to industry and order, as may from time to time appear to be requisite.

If by grants of public money equal to the amount of any local subscriptions for those purposes, the formation of such Societies could be induced, an object of much importance would be attained, in having the superintendence of the Fisheries gratuitously conducted by persons possessing, from local influence and intelligence, the power of accomplishing great improvements in the Fisheries, and in the condition and qualifications of the fishermen.

The Commissioners, however, are not agreed in the expediency of recommending the application of public money for the purposes proposed to be promoted by such associations; but as a portion of their number concur in the policy of the recommendation, it has been considered best to place the proposition in the Report, and also to specify the objects to which it is proposed that the grant should be applied; merely, however, for the information of his Majesty's Government.

The primary intention is, to induce the formation of societies around the coast, for promoting the improvement of the Fisheries,—by contributing to any local funds which may be formed for the purpose, sums equal to the local subscriptions. The contribution to be made annually for a certain number of years; accounts of the transactions of each society to be furnished to Government periodically; and the funds to be applied only to the following objects, or to such others as should be approved of:—

To procure experienced fishermen where required, for the purpose of pointing out the best modes of fishing, and to teach the use of the proper nets and other gear.

To procure specimens of the best nets and gear, suitable to each locality.

To promote the establishment of trading intercourse between the harbours into which fish are brought and the interior towns.

To promote the importation of bait, in localities where it is scarce, and also the establishment of mussel beds, or other depots for bait, in convenient places.

To pay premiums—

1. To each boat-owner, who shall keep his boat employed in fishing throughout the year, having at least three-fourths of the crew composed of persons now engaged in the Irish Fisheries.
2. To each boatman or fisherman, who shall exhibit, half-yearly, the best barked nets, *of hemp*, complete in straps, buoys, and other equipments.
3. To persons now engaged in the Fisheries, who shall, within five years, become owners of completely equipped boats, suitable to the Fisheries of the coast, containing a sufficient and comfortable cabin, and in all respects fit for standing to sea in rough weather.
4. To the fishermen of peaceable and sober habits, who shall have the most comfortable and clean houses.

LOANS TO FISHERMEN.

The late Irish Fishery Board in 1826, set apart for loans £10,000, (being part of an accumulation of the annual fund placed at its disposal,) to aid fishermen in building or repairing boats, and in providing nets and other gear.—(*For Amounts and Results, see Appendix, No. 9.*)

The system of Loan Funds for the relief of struggling industry has been tried in several parts of Ireland, and is believed to have operated favourably, as well on the morals as on the physical condition of the poor; and the Commissioners refer to the evidence of Mr.

Mooney in confirmation of the demand for this sort of relief.—(*See also Galway Evidence, and the Report of the Irish Reproductive Loan Fund, Appendix.*)

But the value of a loan fund, entirely depends on the use which is made of the money. In those instances in which distress proceeds from losses at sea, from sickness, temporary depressions in trade, or other inevitable calamity, it must be a safe and essential relief: but if it ever be suffered to draw additional hands into an employment, which are not called for, its utility would be more than questionable.—(*See evidence of Mr. Young, p. 141.*)—For security against such a consequence, it is desirable that the establishment of local loan funds, receiving aid from the Government, should, in the first instance, flow from a voluntary co-operation of the respectable inhabitants of the district. Such parties, on becoming bound for the repayment of the sums so advanced, will take good care that they are not entrusted to the idle, the dissipated, or the reckless adventurer; and will, in turn, look to a sufficient surety for the borrower's fidelity.

In reference to this subject, it must be mentioned that in Scotland, where the business of fish-curing is kept distinct from that of catching, the curers find it their interest to make advances of money for the repair of boats and for outfits; they being secure of a prompt repayment from the first sales of the fish. Such practices are also common in Cork, and in some other large markets. It likewise appears that Dublin and Liverpool salesmen place themselves in this relation with the fishermen who are engaged in the Isle of Man and the North West Fisheries; and as a bonus for these loans, the salesmen receive a fisherman's share of the sum obtained for the fish taken or bought, and they have, in most cases, the sale of the fish, by which they derive a commission. Their profits are thus very great, but their risk is also great.—(*See the Evidence of Mr. Hoare and Mr. Bartlett, of Dublin; and of Mr. Ternan, of Liverpool.*)

These loans, as well as those made by Scotch fish-curers, and the cash accommodation given by Banks, to which Mr. Mooney's evidence relates—are, however, only suited to meet temporary wants, preceding a fishery, from the gains in which they are to be repaid. For this purpose they are very important; but they are of no avail to poor fishermen requiring new boats or nets; and even for temporary purposes, they can be obtained at a few only of the fishing localities of Ireland; so that in most places, the fishermen are dependent on their credit with retail tradesmen for the means of equipment, and they are said not unfrequently to pay usurious interest for the accommodation.

The Commissioners are therefore led to a conviction that local loan funds for the fisheries might tend to an improvement in the condition of the fishermen, and communicate a desirable increase of activity to the trade.

They conceive that if funds in aid of local contributions were placed at the disposal of the most intelligent contributors associated for their management in various towns around the coast, who should be made responsible for the re-payment, (at the same time being strictly limited in their application,) much good would ensue, by the industry and orderly habits which they must induce; and that they might become the basis of a more enlarged loan system for general purposes, connected with Savings' Banks and Benefit Societies, and then solely depend on the capital deposited by individuals.

To encourage the formation of local Committees for managing such Loan Funds, it has been proposed to the Commissioners—and they think it right to offer the suggestion here—that money for Loans should be advanced on the security of each individual associated; that legal power should be given to the associates to take, as securities, the unstamped notes of the borrowers and their bail, (as in the case of Charitable Loans,) recoverable, if requisite, by summary attachment of property, from local jurisdictions. If such institutions were established, it would be necessary to control them by occasional investigations of accounts, by the publication of transactions, and by limiting the application of the funds, (while aided by Government,) to specific purposes connected with the Fisheries.

FISHING AND CURING STATIONS.

Among the various interferences with the fishing trade, heretofore adopted, the establishment of villages and towns, on the coast of Scotland, for the accommodation of those engaged in the business, is believed to have been productive of the greatest and most permanent effect. For the purpose of thus colonizing the remote shores of that country, the

British Society was incorporated; and to the exertions of this Society, consisting principally of Scotch landlords, Wick, in Caithness (among other stations) owes its existing condition. On that spot, the Society, with the aid of Government, built two harbours, with every desirable convenience for the landing and curing of fish. The number of inhabitants, at first not more than 1500, has been gradually raised to 10,000; most of them more or less directly engaged in the Fisheries. There, traders assemble every summer, with capital, to purchase the produce, and with materials to preserve it, on a scale which ensures the production of a good and cheap article. Thither, consequently, are drawn fishermen from the south of Scotland, and even from England, to pursue the Herring fishery during the season. Wick has thus been rendered the great seat of the North-British Herring Fisheries, and a centre of commerce to the surrounding districts. One principal benefit arising from this effort, is the complete separation of the two trades of curing and of taking; by which not only the usual advantages of a division of labour are secured, but also a sure and steady supply of salt, and a co-ordinate reward for the fisherman's labour: two invaluable desiderata on the Irish coast.—(See *Mr. Loch's Evidence*; also in *Appendix, his Account of Improvements, &c.*)

Previously to the establishment of this and the other fishing stations of Scotland, the fisheries of that country were in the same helpless and inefficient state in which they are now found in the north-west of Ireland. There, were to be seen the same poverty, the same absence of skill, and of the best instruments of labour; the same periodical famines, and the same scanty, yet apparently superabundant population. On these grounds, it has been thought that the Scotch project is well worthy of imitation in Ireland. The antecedents being in both cases identical, the same success is by many anticipated in the one, which has been realized in the other. For the accomplishment of this end, too, experience has proved that a very large outlay would not be necessary. The great danger incurred by the Society, says Mr. Loch, arose from a tendency to overbuilding; while little more is really required to put the curer in motion, than a station for his work, and a weather-tight shed for his salt and barrels.

That the establishment of curing stations, on favourable positions of the north-west coast of Ireland, would give the Fisheries their best chance of a speedy development, the Commissioners are strongly inclined to believe; but they are at the same time bound to declare, that they do not anticipate an immediate sequence of all those important results which attended the labours of the British Society. Statements have been made from parties locally interested, to show that the Wick curers are actually suffering severely from over production; that they are, at the present prices, working at a loss, because they cannot withdraw their capital; and that they are deeply in debt to the country bankers.—(See *copies of Communications supplied by Mr. Loch, Appendix.*)

It was to the foreign markets, opened during the revolutionary war, by the destruction of the Dutch fisheries, that the Scotch adventurers, in a great measure, owed success in their struggle to establish their Herring fishery; but it is in the domestic market that the Irishman would at present almost exclusively find a vent for additional production. Still, in considering the condition of the Irish Herring fishery, it must be borne in mind, that the Irishman wants altogether the means of curing properly the fish, now capable of being taken, and in great part lost to the fishermen and the community.—(See *Evidence taken on the coasts of Donegal, Mayo, and Galway.*)

Formerly, notwithstanding the stimulus to curers given by the Bounties, the high price of salt, in consequence of the tax, operated against the Irish fishermen even more than the want of sufficient curing establishments does now. In that period, (prior to 1825, when the salt duties were repealed,) great quantities of Herrings rotted for want of salt, and were used for manure. The ordinary price of salt was then above £7. per ton; but at present, even in Galway, it is only £1. 5s. per ton. However, during the seasons of the Herring Fishery, the price is augmented to 30s. or more; and in the last winter Fishery, in consequence of the extraordinary supply of fish, the stock of salt was inadequate, and the price advanced in Galway to £7. at the merchant's stores, and was augmented to £10. by the retailers. Well appointed curing establishments would avert the recurrence of an evil so extensively injurious, which not only deprives the fisherman of a reward for his industry, but renders an important article of diet unfit for use.

INSPECTING AND BRANDING IN THE HERRING TRADE.

When the Dutch Herring Fisheries began their career of prosperity, it was a policy adopted by the Hollanders, to lay down very minute directions relative to the modes of taking and curing the fish: to appoint inspectors to see that these directions were complied with; and to impose marks on the containing vessels, that should guarantee to purchasers the goodness of the article.

From habit, from routine, or from a conviction of the advantage of this institution, the branding system is still a part of the Dutch law.—(*See Appendix.*)

The British Herring Fisheries having been taken up partly for the purpose of wresting the trade from Holland, the Legislature, in its regulations, copied as closely as possible the rivals it was endeavouring to supplant.

The rudest and most imperfect methods of curing Herrings prevailed in these countries, at the time when the Herring trade was adopted as a national object; and in order to introduce the Dutch mode, the grant of Bounties was coupled with the obligation to comply with the principal regulations of the Dutch trade, and to submit the article to inspectors for branding. But though the branding and bounties were thus practically combined, they were not made so legally dependent on each other, that the one must necessarily cease with the abolition of the other. It happened, accordingly, that when the bounties were discontinued, the inspecting system was still maintained in Scotland; while in Ireland it was suffered to fall to the ground. It is therefore a question for consideration, whether the branding should be revived in Ireland, or abolished universally in the British Islands.

The object of the system is, to prevent individuals from bringing to market an inferior article, to the injury of the general trade; but the interference of a third party between the manufacturer and his customer, cannot but be a dragging of both, *coram non judice*, before a tribunal almost of necessity incompetent to act discriminately. In almost every trade in which such interferences have been attempted, they have been found to be ineffectual to their proposed end, while they are vexatious and troublesome; fettering the trader, and therefore raising the price of the goods to the consumer, for whose benefit they are undertaken. This mode of intervention has accordingly never been very widely extended in the several branches of general commerce; and the public feeling having turned against it, the practice has been gradually dropped, till the exceptions have become so few, that they serve less to justify the rule, than to discountenance it.

Against its application to the herring trade, it has been urged, that this sort of protection is no more necessary, than it is to the curers of beef and pork. It is also contended, that even if useful in Holland, the Dutch and British trades are so differently circumstanced, as to preclude analogy in this particular. The Dutch, it is said, fish and cure for the markets of Germany, where the article is sought as an object of luxury, and therefore, quality is the great end to be attained; for there, Herrings sell so high as £2. 10s. and £3. per barrel, and repay the extra cost of preparation. On the other hand, the evidence from Scotland is in favour of the branding. It is stated that the branded Herring not only bears a higher price, but that many merchants will not buy the unbranded article at all. This must, to a certain extent perhaps, be an inevitable consequence, as long as the system continues. But then again, it is stated, that the brand is viewed as indicating only a moderate average of excellence,—the lowest indeed, that will pass muster; and that the private mark of any house of good repute is relied upon to a far greater extent.—(*See Mr. Loch's Evidence.*)—It is further remarked, that the curing of Red Herrings, never subjected to inspection, has been improved more than the curing of White Herrings.—(*See Papers communicated by Mr. Loch.*) The brand denotes quantity, and the mode of curing, but not the quality of the fish. In proof of this, a lot of Scotch branded Herrings, recently imported into Dublin, were found to be unfit for general sale, and were taken by a dealer, on speculation, at a very low price.

Amidst this difference of opinion, the returns of the Scotch and Irish officers, indicating the quantities branded, unbranded, and exported, may serve as some criterion of the value of such intervention, both absolutely and in relation to its cost.—(*See Appendix.*)

In Ireland, branding is but little required, if even desirable; as only a small portion of the fish cured is put into barrels. Of the large quantity cured in Galway last winter, only two thousand barrels were made up.—(*See Galway Evidence.*)—The utility of curing in barrels,

is, that the pickle formed by the juices of the fish and the salt, is preserved, and that the curer can immediately transmit the fish to a distant market; but curing in vats would be equally efficient for the former purpose; and would be more suited to the trade occasioned at the curing places by the demand of country dealers, who attend in Galway and elsewhere provided with vessels for carrying the fish.

Curing in bulk or pile, is the prevailing system of Ireland. It tends to injure the quality of the fish, as this mode of curing cannot be used, when the Herrings are fresh from the sea: they first must be suffered to drain, and then they are packed with close pressure. This mode, however, is unfit for the rich summer Herrings of the western coast, which must be cured in vats or barrels, or consumed fresh, as they will not bear the pressure requisite in bulk curing.—(*See Galway Evidence.*)—Nothing, indeed, can be more slovenly than the general manner in which Herrings are cured in Ireland. They are stowed away in stores, or in decked boats, piled in enormous masses; and, in many instances, the process is not commenced till the fish have ceased to be fresh,—the curers standing out for prices with the fishermen. But however desirable it may be, that a better system of curing should be practised in Ireland, it is highly doubtful that the brand could be made an efficient agent in introducing it.

The Commissioners have heard no complaints of the want of a branding system in Ireland; though an opinion has been expressed, that if branding be good for Scotland, Ireland should not be deprived of its benefit. But if the cumbrous machinery for carrying the system into execution were to be maintained at the expense of the trade, and not of the public, there can be little doubt, not only that Ireland would reject it, but that Scotland would demand its abolition.

With a view of giving special protection to curers, it might be desirable to impose a penalty for frauds committed by assuming their private brands;—as a summary reparation could thus be obtained.

On the whole, the Commissioners are inclined to suggest, that a subject so important merits an entire revision; and to recommend that the question of branding and inspecting be referred to the Board of Trade, with a view to rendering the law uniform in all parts of the empire.

TRAWLING.

There is no part of the present investigation more beset with difficulties, than to ascertain the point to which the Legislature is bound to restrain the fisherman in the exercise of his art, with reference to engines and to practices deemed dangerous to the preservation of the breed of fish. It is here, that evidence fails altogether to satisfy the mind; scarcely a single fact being advanced which is not positively contradicted, by equally respectable testimony. The validity of any doctrine on these subjects reposes on facts in the natural history of the animal to which it refers; and the habits of fish are very little known, even to the best writers on Ichthyology. In almost all such questions, conflicting interests are engaged; and complaints are most commonly directed against the practices of rivals.—(*See Evidence of Captain Ross, p. 7.*)—It occurs, likewise, that when any particular fishery has ceased to be productive, the minds of the sufferers go, as it were, on a criminating inquiry, in search of a plausible cause for explaining the phenomenon; and then, the imagination eagerly seizes upon some circumstance by which a rival exclusively profits. The rival, too, necessarily strives to justify his own practices; and thus what one party asserts, the other as strenuously denies.

All these doubts and difficulties especially beset the question of Trawling, a practice which the whole body of line-fishers are anxious to suppress.

Of the trawl it cannot be doubted, notwithstanding much contradictory statement, that the produce is abundant, and obtained with comparatively little labour; in short, that it is an effective instrument,—in so far tending to bring down the price of fish, and to depress the condition of those who use inferior methods. To this cause some part at least of the complaints must be attributed with which its use is assailed.

These complaints are, 1st, that by disturbing the ground where the fish are believed to spawn, it destroys the germs of immense quantities.

2nd, That by the smallness of the mesh, it destroys the fry and undersized fish, to the further diminution of the breed.

3rd, That in its passage over the bottom, it frightens the fish, and drives them from the banks; thus disturbing more particularly the shoals of migratory species, and damaging the Fisheries in a serious degree; and,

4th, It is urged, which is perhaps the grievance most deeply felt, that by fishing in bays and harbours, the trawlers pre-occupy the only ground to which the poorer fishermen can gain access—divested, as the latter are, of boats, suited to deep-sea fishing.

With respect to the destruction of spawn, Mr. Bartlett of Dublin, (who, however, is himself a trawler,) positively declares that the trawl is not used in that shallow water, in which the common species of fish spawn; and he denies that flat fish spawn near the shore at all. On the other hand, numerous witnesses depose, that enormous quantities of spawn are actually brought up by the trawls, insomuch that the “fishermen are knee-deep in the substance.”

That the trawl does in reality fish up much living substance, must necessarily happen; but that the whole, or any considerable part of it, is really spawn, is still problematical; while the very largeness of the quantity is strong presumptive proof to the contrary. It is singular, that naturalists are not agreed as to the spawning places of fishes. Bingley, (*Animal Biography*,) states, that the more usual white fish spawn on rocks, and on the submarine vegetation which grows on rocks; but these form a bottom on which the trawl cannot be used. Sir Humphry Davy also states, that “fishes which spawn in the sea or lakes, almost always come to the shallows, and deposit their eggs upon vegetables, which by their agency keep the water saturated with air.”—(*House of Commons' Report on the Salmon Fishery*.)

Mr. Mitchell, of Leith, has, however, furnished the Commissioners with evidence as to the identity of Herring spawn, and as to its being disturbed by the trawlers: so that if the extreme prolific powers of this animal do not place it beyond the reach of injury from the utmost efforts of man, a case is made out against the trawler, as respects this fish.

But it is mathematically certain, that if a very few hundreds only, of Herrings, be supposed to escape at the end of a fishing season, and be allowed to bring their ova to maturity, they would more than replace the destruction of the most successful fishery. It is therefore improbable that the most assiduous trawling should so entirely cover the spawning ground of a long line of coast, as to sensibly affect the numbers of so prolific an animal.

Many witnesses indeed vouch for the positive fact of injury thus sustained; but where so many other known and unknown causes may subsist to occasion the temporary disappearance of Herrings, the weight of this testimony must be considerably diminished.—(*See Swedish Papers*.)

With respect to the destruction of the fry of other fish, very positive evidence is offered. On this subject, the communication made by Mr. Cornish to the British Channel Committee, may serve as an epitome. “Brixam alone,” (he says,) “has 150 Trawling Smacks, which might be drawn 48 times in 24 hours. Allowing only one haul per hour, this would be 3,600 hauls in one day, every time loaded with all descriptions of young Turbot, Brill, Sole, Flounders, &c. &c.; all of which, not selected for market, are returned dead to the sea.”—(*See Extract in Appendix*.)

That this is a possible, and not an actual case, is evident in the terms; but that the Trawl, as it is usually constructed, does destroy large quantities of fry, cannot be disputed. Admitting, however, the fact, it is doubted by many sound thinkers, that the consequent destruction really affects the quantity of fish in the sea, to any notable extent. “A Cod produces more than three millions of eggs, a Ling nineteen millions, and most other fish several hundred thousand.”—(*The General Report of Scotland, vol. 3, p. 334.*) It is abundantly probable, too, that the destruction of young occasioned by the most active Trawlers, sinks into insignificance, before the wholesale voracity of the natural enemies of the species in their own element; and if so, the practice (as far as relates to this imputed evil,) should be regarded as one of those *minima*, of which the law takes no cognizance.

As to the charge of frightening away the fish,—that, in some cases, may be probable: but the action of the Trawl, is likewise stated to attract round fish to the spot, by loosening and stirring up a quantity of animal food, which is sought for by these fish; just as the Gudgeon fisher attracts his prey by raking the gravel at the scene of his operations. It is in evidence, that a large take of round fish was made at night, on ground which had been trawled on the preceding day by eight boats.—(*Evidence of Mr. Roderick, Youghal.*)

That the bulk of the evidence is hostile to the continued legality of Trawling must be

freely admitted; and it is not without hesitation that the Commissioners refuse to give to the depositions the weight and authority which their mass, at first sight, seems to claim. But in inquiries like the present, the prevalent error is a confounding of imputed with real causes. It is seldom that plausible causes are wanting, even for effects which exist only in the imagination. The diminished take, for example, of large Haddock in Dublin Bay, already noticed, is universally attributed to the practice of Trawling, because the two incidents have followed in close sequence; yet, the same diminution has been noticed in Galway, where the trawl is not in operation.

Such are the principal facts in favour of, or against the Trawl; and the Commissioners are bound to report, that the opinions against it, whether founded or otherwise, are prevalent along all parts of the coast, as well where that engine is not used, as where it is employed. In Scotland, too, where, from the rocky nature of the coasts, the Trawl is but little known, it is equally proscribed on the few places which admit of its use; and a Bill was before Parliament in the last Session to limit its application in the English fisheries.

On the other hand, many who advocate the admission of the Trawl are persons not interested, except as consumers; while the complaints proceed very principally from those who cannot, or will not, afford to purchase expensive tackle. It may also be inferred, that if the Trawl had really diminished the stock, it would already have been abandoned; for even Trawlers could not work remuneratively, where the fish are not.—(*See Balbriggan and Dublin Evidence.*)

With respect to the remedies for this imputed evil, some persons recommend a total suppression of Trawling; a proposition wholly untenable. Others desire to prohibit it in bays and harbours, within a chord extending from headland to headland.

The line-fishermen, desirous to have possession of a clear ground for themselves, would extend the prohibition to a league or more beyond the headlands. Again, with regard to time, it is by some persons thought sufficient to prohibit Trawling during the breeding season only; while others desire its suppression throughout the whole year.—(*See Evidence of Messrs. Gowan, Tallon, Captain Clements, &c., Dublin.*)

In deciding on this point, the interest of the public is the great consideration. As, however, the open sea is the place of the 'Trawl-fishers' most profitable operations; and as the Trawl if fairly constructed, can, there, do little, if any injury; the protection of the bay line-fisher would be no substantial injury to the trawler; and Mr. Bartlett strongly recommends that such a protection should be extended, by prohibiting trawls within the Bay of Dublin. Such a regulation, he thinks, would give great satisfaction to the line-men, and would tend to the preservation of the peace, even if it be not necessary to the preservation of the spawn. This prohibition would in fact be a valuable boon to the line-fisher, by affording ground for his operations, where he would be safe from the movements of the trawl-boat, which at present not unfrequently commit great ravages on his tackle; and those protected spots would be a common for the poor, with which the richer fishermen could well afford to part.

As to limitations of time, it does not appear that this would be requisite in relation to the deep-sea. The abundant destruction of fry is a consequence, not of the use of the trawl, but of certain contrivances for abusively increasing the take; such as employing nets with small meshes, using double nets, or lining the pouches with cow hides, which suffer nothing living to escape. These are all, in spirit or in letter, practices forbidden by the existing law, and perhaps ought to be restrained. Properly modified, the operations of the trawler in the open sea might then be left to his own discretion, even on the most adverse view of the case; and the Commissioners would require stronger evidence than they have yet received, to induce them to recommend the total prohibition of that engine.

It is further to be stated, that trawling, at the present moment, is confined to a few spots only on the whole Irish coast; and that in Dublin, Dundrum, Galway, and Dingle Bays it has been suppressed or resisted by open force.

In the event of a consolidation of the Fishery laws, (at present spread so widely through the Statute Book, and so difficult to interpret,) the legality or illegality of trawling must be definitely provided for. But, if any restraint in this respect should be deemed prudent, it must be rather on special, than on general grounds: the Commissioners, therefore, are induced to think that a uniform enactment would hardly meet the necessity of each locality—(*See the Irish Commissioners' Letter to Lord L. Gower, Appendix, p. 27.*)—and they consider that the matter might be better and more safely entrusted to some responsible administra-

tive Board, already subsisting for other purposes, so as not to incur a new expense, disproportionate to the object. Such a Board might be empowered to frame or adopt rules for each fishing ground, on petition from the fishermen: these regulations to be reported to Parliament, and to be amended from time to time, as the circumstances might require.

TRAMMEL NETS.

The use of the trammel net is likewise a cause of much dissension; and various evidence has been offered both for and against its employment. It appears, however,—(*See Evidence of John Sullivan, p. 136,*)—that one great objection to it is, its efficacy as an instrument, and its consequent influence on the price of fish. The Commissioners do not see cause for recommending any restriction on its use in the open sea; (*See account of the Norway Fisheries, in Appendix;*)—but within bays and harbours, the evidence of injury attendant on its unrestricted employment is uniform,—(*See Kerry and Cork Evidence,*)—and is entitled to consideration. The late Fishery Board for Ireland were empowered to license the trammel, or prohibit it, according to the varieties of local circumstance; and the Commissioners are of opinion, that a similar power might still be advantageously confided to some body exercising (as recommended for the case of trawling) a general superintendence over the Irish Fisheries, to be appointed by his Majesty's Government.—(*See Regulations for Dingle and Bantry Bays, Appendix.*)

OF RESTRICTIONS RELATING TO SEASONS, &c. &c.

Complaints are made of premature fishing for Herrings, by which it is asserted that the shoals are scared away from the bays.—(*Isle of Man, Galway, and Clare Evidence.*)

But the movements of Herrings are said to be too irregular to admit of the enforcement of a limited time for commencing a fishery; and therefore, it is urged, that the fishermen should have the right to take whenever or wherever the fish may be found.

The accusation of thus breaking up the shoals, before they have settled on the fishing grounds, is affirmed to be generally directed in the Isle of Man, against strangers, who have no permanent interest in the local fishery. The complaint may therefore be as much an expression of hostility to rivals, as a matter of just and honest alarm. It is, however, the decided opinion of the two Commissioners who visited this island, that the subject demands serious attention, and requires the establishment of fixed regulations.

A similar complaint is made against strangers, that they shoot their nets in daylight, which is asserted to produce the worst effects in disturbing the shoals. This complaint is also made by the Isle of Man fishers against the St. Ives men; and the Commissioners wrote on the subject to a competent correspondent at St. Ives, and to the Fishery Superintendent of the station, commanding the "Swift Cutter" of Leith, who stated that the accusation is founded in error. That the practice, when pursued, is injurious, can readily be imagined, and the Commissioners conceive that it may be a fit subject for local regulation.

There must indeed arise, from time to time, a vast variety of other points, affording matter of dispute and of disturbance, which require to be dealt with in a summary way. To meet these, the power of local regulation might be made an efficient aid to the fisherman in his labours.—(*See Mr. O'Driscoll's Evidence, p. 144.*)

The example of Sweden, Belgium, and of Holland, may be quoted on this mode of regulation. In these countries, all matters of general import are determined by a national law; but local interests are provided for by the bye-laws of local authorities. The local regulations adopted in the Isle of Man, and sanctioned by the insular law will be found in the Minutes of Evidence.

The Dutch law regulates the size of the mesh of all nets to be used in the Herring Fisheries; and this regulation has been adopted in the English Statute Book. The object sought by the Dutch was, to prevent the capture of Herrings under a given size; for the purpose of keeping up the reputation of the national market; and the British regulation of the mesh is very generally lauded in the Scotch reports, as essential to the prosperity of the Fisheries. Should it be thought advisable to retain such a provision for the future, it would be well to define more accurately the required size of the mesh. On this point, the wording of our Statute leaves ground for dispute; whereas the Dutch law settles the

point beyond contradiction,—by determining the size of the netting-pin to be used, and directing that standard measures for the pin, applicable to the meshes themselves, shall be provided to be employed in all disputed cases.

It must, however, be observed, that with respect to the general policy of all interferences with the freedom of industry, in these and similar particulars, there is much ground for hesitation; and there is, in the present case, a minuteness of legislation, which throws great suspicion on its presumed utility.—(*See Mr. Hutchins' Evidence, page 144.*) That there should be a right to interfere where public interests are injured by individuals, requires no proof; and the sea, though a common, open for all to resort to, is not so much the property of any individual, that he may lawfully work it, to the detriment of his neighbours, or of the nation at large. But, though the right of legislative interference is thus clear, the wisdom of exercising it, is, by the nature of things, restricted within a narrow compass.

Before such interference is assumed, the particular restriction requires a special justification: a necessity must be demonstrated; and in all cases of doubt, the wisdom is to abstain. The general maxim, therefore, is to interfere as little as possible, and never to advance a step on speculative grounds.

For this reason the Commissioners are the more inclined to think that such special cases are best met by local, rather than Parliamentary regulations; and to doubt of the possibility of well providing for them by any general legislative enactment. It seems, however, that the fishermen in some localities call for a specific law to regulate the sale of fish. For this purpose, the Commissioners recommend that it be made imperative to sell fresh Herrings wholesale, from the boats, by the Cran Measure used in Scotland.

FISHERY PROTECTION.

It is in evidence that great injury to property arises from unrestrained violence among the fishermen while at sea, as well as from their combinations while on land; and that the regulations enacted for the peaceable conduct of the Fisheries have been rendered nugatory by the difficulty of identifying offenders, and of bringing them within a competent jurisdiction. These evils are not peculiar to Ireland. Macdonald, in his Survey of the Hebrides, after noticing the premature disturbance of the Herring shoals, and the setting of nets by daylight, adds, that “In the eagerness to have the nets placed in the most favourable position, they are often crossed, so as to prove mutually obstructive; and the boats of the larger vessels, trusting to the superior strength of the crews, often maliciously carry off the buoys, and cut the nets of the boat-fishers; while the larger vessels often steer across their nets, in order to obstruct the boat-fishing, and to monopolize the whole shoal to themselves.” Such violences, independently of the consequent breaches of the peace, check the development of the Fisheries, and enhance the price of fish to the consumers: and wherever the fishermen assemble in large bodies, serious evils from these causes are matters of every day complaint. It is therefore manifest, that on such points, a force to preserve the peace, equal to encounter the difficulty and to overawe the offenders, is essential to the prosperity of the trade. For this object, active and efficient bodies present themselves, already organized, in the Coast Guard and Revenue Cruizers, on all parts of the coast. There is, then, an excellent machinery in existence; and it is only necessary to direct its use; and to extend the authority of the magistracy, in maritime counties, to a cognizance of offences committed by fishermen at sea:—a power which the law of Scotland already gives to the Sheriffs-depute.—(*Act of 1815, cap. 94.*)

Law being thus brought home to the scene of action, it would be further desirable, (if this could be effected without grievance to the fishermen,) that all vessels engaged in fishing should be registered, and numbers or other distinctive marks affixed on them, in large and visible characters, so as to insure their identification, in cases of outrage upon the open sea.

At the great Fishery Stations of Scotland, it has been found necessary to employ armed Admiralty vessels, during the Herring season, to preserve the peace; the large numbers of men assembled on one point requiring a corresponding force to inspire respect, and to maintain the law. A similar support is occasionally required for the Irish Fisheries; and even during the last winter, vessels were thus employed, with great benefit to the Fishery, off the coasts of Donegal and Galway;—not only maintaining order, but saving the lives of fishermen when endangered by boisterous weather; and also preserving nets, which would otherwise have been lost.—(*See Evidence taken at Killybegs and Roundstone; also Ardglass Evidence, Co. Down.*)

FISHERY CORPORATIONS AND COMPANIES.

The success attendant upon the labours of the British Society has placed the Scottish Fisheries in a very imposing position; but it has not otherwise rewarded the capitalists, through whom this success has been attained. No dividend has yet been made on the large capital expended, although the Society has existed since the year 1786; but direct pecuniary profit, it appears, was never looked for by the members of the Society: they are chiefly proprietors of Scottish estates; and their paramount object has been the improvement of the Scottish Highlands. Ultimately, however, the lands which they have taken for Fishing Towns, Hamlets, and Fishermen's allotments, with the Harbours, Stores and other Buildings, which they have constructed, may yield a return in rent, to the Society, beyond that now made by their fisheries to Scotland at large.—(*See Mr. Loch's Evidence.*)

The evidence which the Commissioners have obtained, and the publications which they have consulted, coincide in representing as total failures, attended with most pernicious results, almost every effort of Societies or Companies, formed for realising direct pecuniary profits by the Sea Fisheries;—although many of them have been promoted with every possible bonus that monopoly and privilege could impart. Wherever the effort has been made, it has proved that the servants of a company do not usually work with that activity and economy, to be found among individuals working for themselves, which are especially requisite in the business of Fishing. Unavoidable waste and extravagance have arisen, even where fraud and culpable neglect have not appeared; and the uniform consequence has been, a gradual but constant absorption of the capital advanced.—(*See Mr. Bartlett's Evidence, Dublin; Extracts from British Evidence; and Irish Fishing Companies, in Appendix.*)

As parts of a grand plan of national encouragement to the Fisheries, the Commissioners are bound to speak of such speculations according to the experience of the past, and to hold out but small hopes of their eventual benefit. If any success is to be expected through their operation, the associators must confine themselves to the business of curers and exporters. Limited to such mercantile operations, they may succeed; while by affording employment to the fishermen, they would be productive of at least temporary good. But if they extend their activity to Fishing, (a business peculiarly dependent on individual enterprise, skill and care,) they will but diminish the activity and impair the morals of the fishermen hired, and eventually leave the Fisheries in a worse condition, than that, in which they found them.

SUMMARY OF REMEDIAL MEASURES.

It is probably expected that some great proposition for a sudden improvement of the Irish Fisheries will originate with this Commission; but whatever disappointment may arise from the confession, the Commissioners feel it a duty to declare, that the result of their most anxious inquiries is, a full persuasion that no means can be proposed for obtaining, by any short process, so desirable an event.

The progress of a gradual improvement may indeed be assisted and hastened by certain measures, in which the Government might beneficially co-operate; but a real and permanent prosperity can only be effected by the hearty endeavours of individuals and bodies, locally interested, who, from good motives or trading enterprize, may seize favourable opportunities, and apply means for the purpose.

The Commissioners, therefore, cannot recommend that the Government should take a part in any other remedial measures, than those embraced by the following propositions:—

1stly, That in order to remove many vexatious doubts on the laws as they at present exist, every Act in any way relating to the Sea Fisheries of Ireland be totally repealed and that all provisions deemed necessary, be embodied in one Statute.

2ndly, That the chief superintendence and control of all matters connected with the Fisheries be vested in some Public Department, which shall make an annual Report of its proceedings, to be laid before Parliament.

3rdly, That the jurisdiction of the local Magistracy, in maritime Counties, be extended to offences committed by fishermen at sea; and that it be made the duty of the Coast Guard as a Marine Police, to aid the Magistracy and the Superintending Authority, so as, without much increased expense, to enforce the law, and carry into effect such regulations as the latter body may from time to time adopt.

4thly, That agreeably to the enactments of the 48th Geo. III., cap. 110, sec. 8,—of the 55th Geo. III., cap. 94,—and of the 59th Geo. III., cap. 109, sec. 51,—a Government vessel be furnished at the requisition of the Superintending Body, at such times and places, as may be deemed necessary for the protection and assistance of the Fisheries; and that a competent authority for the preservation of the peace accompany such vessels.

5thly, That the superintending body be empowered, to institute, or, on requisition after public notice, from persons interested in the Fisheries of any particular district, to adopt and confirm, any local regulations which they shall consider as decidedly salutary, either for the due conduct of the fishermen, for the preservation of the peace, or for the protection of the Fisheries.

6thly, That such further pecuniary aid be given for the construction and maintenance of any piers, harbours, and other public accommodations, as may be deemed requisite to the service of the Fisheries; that provision be made for the repair and maintenance of all those which have been provided entirely or partly at the public expense, and may be thought worthy of being preserved; that they shall be declared public property; and that power be given to frame and enforce such rules and regulations as may seem desirable, in order to render them as generally useful and available as possible.

7thly, That the balance which shall remain to the credit of the Irish Fisheries, after defraying the charges to which it is now liable, be applied under the authority of the Lords of the Treasury, in the completion and repairs of such of the existing Fishery Piers, as may be considered deserving of attention, and in promoting improvements generally in the Fisheries.

8thly, That section 85 of the 1st and 2nd Wm. IV., cap. 33, be so modified, that the funds placed by that Act at the disposal of the Board of Works, be rendered not only available to the construction of any Pier, Shelter-harbour, Boat-slip, or Capstan, but to the providing of Moorings and Small Harbour Lights for the Fisheries, to the extent of one moiety of the expense; the other moiety to be raised by voluntary contribution of proprietors, fishermen, curers, or others, or by public assessment; that the existing condition, which requires security to the Crown for future repairs, be removed; and that it shall be competent to the Board, at discretion, to admit, as a substitute for money contribution, an equivalent value in materials, or in work applied conformably to a previously approved plan.

9thly, That it shall be competent to cess payers, rated at above _____ annually, in any County, Barony, Half-barony, or Townland, to assess the locality in such sum as may be necessary for making up a moiety of the expense of the works specified in the preceding proposition, or of any portion thereof; the assessment to be distributed over a number of years, proportionately to the amount.

10thly, That power be given to establish moderate tolls, to defray the necessary expenses of maintenance of each Pier or Harbour erected for fishery purposes, either in whole, or in part with public money; and if the amounts arising from such tolls shall exceed the sums required for the permanent repair of the works, that such excess be allowed to accumulate to the credit of the work, as a provision for those sudden and extraordinary casualties to which such works are liable, and for the further improvement of the Harbour.

11thly, That it be competent to the Board of Works, at discretion, to make short lines of communication between such Piers, Fishing Harbours or Stations, (as have wholly, or in part, been erected, or shall be erected, by public funds,) and the nearest high roads; a moiety of the amount so expended to be levied on the Barony by annual instalments, or provided by voluntary contribution.

12thly, That in cases where Loan Funds, under the management of local associations shall be established, to assist fishermen in procuring, repairing, or fitting out boats intended for the prosecution of the Fisheries, a moiety of these funds shall be supplied out of the public money, (to be sufficiently secured in the repayment by the associators requiring that aid,) that the same legal privileges and indulgences be extended to such associations, as are given to charitable societies, under “the Charitable Loan Acts;” and that the proceedings and accounts

of these associations shall be at all times subject to the scrutiny of the controlling body, under whose management the general interests of the Fisheries may be placed.

13thly, That such local Loan Funds be encouraged in each of the maritime Counties, to assist fishermen.

14thly, That Loans, not exceeding a moiety of the expense, be made by the Board of Works, on the most favourable terms, to parties desirous of erecting Curing-houses, Fishery-yards, Salt-stores, or Fishermen's Houses, under proper security for their accomplishment, according to plans previously approved;—provided the expense, in any case, shall not be less than two hundred pounds.

15thly, That Tenants in Tail, and Bodies Corporate, be empowered, notwithstanding settlements, or incumbrances, to make leases in perpetuity, at the full improved value, of any portions of land required for fishery purposes, adjacent to the shores of Ireland: such leases to be valid, provided a sum equal to five years rent be expended in good and substantial buildings on the land, within seven years.

16thly, That the section of the statute of Charles the First, securing to the public a right to the use of the strands and wastes on the shores of Ireland, for Fishery purposes, and conferring a complete freedom of Fishing on all British subjects, be clearly established by a further enactment.—(*See 10th Charles I., cap. 24, Irish Statutes.*)

17thly, That a Practical Education in the Manufacture of Nets, and in other Fishery avocations, be adopted in the National Schools of the maritime districts of Ireland.

(Signed)

CHARLES A. WALKER.

J. F. BURGOYNE.

T. CHARLES MORGAN.

BROOK T. OTTLEY.

JAMES REDMOND BARRY.

HENRY TOWNSEND.

HENRY R. PAINE.

WM. STANLEY.

J. RADCLIFF.

JOHN JAGOE.

*Department of Public Works,
Dublin, 31st October, 1836.*

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

COUNTY DUBLIN—NORTH OF THE BAY.

Balbriggan, 7th December, 1835.

EXAMINING COMMISSIONERS—Messrs. TOWNSEND AND STANLEY.

PRESENT—Sir WM. PALMER, Bart. of Kenure Park, Proprietor of Rush; Mr. JAS. HANS HAMILTON, of Sheephill, Proprietor of Skerries; Mr. GEORGE ALEX. HAMILTON, of Hampton Hall, Proprietor of Balbriggan; and several other gentlemen, with the local Officers of the Coast Guard.

WITNESSES—Mr. JOHN MURPHY, of Balbriggan, Mr. JAMES HOGAN, of Skerries, Mr. ARMSTRONG, of Skerries, Mr. DOYLE, of Rush, Boatowners; Mr. DIXON, of Rush; and several Fishermen.

Before the taking of evidence was commenced, Mr. George Alexander Hamilton read from a printed paper, the following Resolutions adopted at a Meeting of Gentlemen, Boat-owners, Fisheurers, and Fishermen, held at Balbriggan in March, 1834, and then gave in the paper to the Commissioners:

“Resolved—That the Irish Fisheries are capable of affording a most abundant and most profitable source of productive employment, and their encouragement and improvement have frequently been recognized by the Legislature, as an object of essential importance to the wealth and commercial prosperity, as well as to the naval strength, of the United Kingdom.

“That from the remoteness of the fishing banks, and the exposed nature of the coasts of Ireland in general, no other description of boat than wherries, smacks and hookers, (averaging from fifteen to fifty tons,) can prosecute the Fisheries with safety and advantage for the whole year;—the small-boat fishery being very precarious and unattainable, except when the fish come close to the shore.

“That the cost of those boats, and the outfit thereof, and the constant wear and tear to which they are liable, is so considerable, as to require an amount of capital greater than the boatowners can afford, or from the produce of their industry can at present hope to supply; and that as a substitute for capital, it was the pleasure of Parliament, until the year 1830, to encourage the Fisheries by aid in the shape of Bounties.

“That up to the period when such public encouragement was withdrawn, the Irish Fisheries were in a state of progressive improvement; there being between the years 1822 and 1829 an increase in the number of men employed in the Fisheries of from 36,159, to 63,421, and in boats, of from 7,655, to 13,119;—that a spirit of enterprise was beginning to be excited;—that the fish cured was increasing annually in quantity and improving in quality, and a wholesome article of food procured by the industry of fishermen for the subsistence of our impoverished Irish population, on cheaper terms than the same could possibly be procured by importation.

“That since the withdrawal of that encouragement, the Fisheries of Ireland have been gradually becoming more and more depressed in their condition; that the fishing vessels are fast getting out of repair, and the owners without the means of repairing them, and our hardy and industrious fishermen, and the various tradesmen connected with the Fisheries, are now, for the most part, added to the already too numerous classes of our unemployed and pauper population.

“That however, on abstract principles of political economy, bounties may be objectionable and inexpedient, yet we cannot recognize the propriety of applying those abstract principles to a country circumstanced like Ireland;—a country in which the natural channels of industry are impeded and obstructed—in which (contrary to all principles of political economy) the quantity of capital bears no relation to the extent of population—a country overwhelmed with debt, and drained by Absenteeism, and in which so large a proportion of the inhabitants, being unable, though most willing, to obtain employment, are in a great degree dependent for subsistence upon the charity or industry of others; That we therefore deprecate the unreserved application of those abstract principles to Ireland in her present condition, while we deplore at the same time, that her state should be such as to render either bounties, or any other artificial excitements to employment, expedient or necessary.

“That the expense of outfit, for fishing vessels on the eastern coast of Ireland, being considerable and certain, and the taking of fish being necessarily precarious, a small Tonnage Bounty, just sufficient to afford protection against a ruinous loss, and yet not large enough to operate as an inducement to fraud, together with a small Production Bounty, as a stimulus to successful industry, appear to us to be the means best calculated to promote our Fisheries; and that, in the opinion of this Meeting, twenty shillings per ton, for boats not exceeding fifty tons burthen, and *bona fide* employed nine months in fishing, together with one shilling per barrel for cured Herrings, and one shilling per cwt. for dried Cod, Ling, &c., would restore our Fisheries on the eastern coast to their former state of prosperity, at an expense to the country of not more than between £4000 and £5000 a year.

“That a Petition to Parliament, founded on the foregoing Resolutions, be now adopted, and praying for a local Inquiry into the state of our several Fisheries, the causes that have led to that state, and the best means of reviving them; and that we feel it to be the more incumbent upon Parliament to grant such a Commission of Inquiry, inasmuch as a Committee of the House of Commons was appointed last session for the benefit of the English Fisheries, and have recommended that every possible aid and encouragement should be afforded to the English Fisheries, the advantages of which Committee of Inquiry were not extended to the Fisheries of Ireland.”

At Balbriggan, in 1820, there were seventeen boats, of from 25 to 57 tons burden, each of which employed seven or eight men; whereas now, there are only twelve of these boats engaged in the Fisheries, and each of the twelve employs six or eight men.

In Skerries, in 1820, fifty-two boats were employed, of from 20 to 57 tons burden, and each of them had on board six or eight men. At present, only thirty-eight of these vessels are employed, and each of them is manned as in 1820.